

## Criteria for Judging Essays in the Creative Writing Competition 2013

In 2013 a percent system will be applied in an effort to streamline the writing competition and to make judging less subjective, and more easily understood. Each essay should initially be read by 2-3 judges still, and the following criteria should be applied:

Creativity	40%
Structure	20%
Adherence to Topic	10%
Grammar	10%
Length	10%
<u>"Wow!" factor</u>	<u>10%</u>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>

These criteria are discussed at length below. For every 10% of the score, there is a corresponding question to be answered—if the answer to the question is “yes,” then that 10% should be awarded. If the answer is “no”, then it should not.

After the essays have been read once by 2-3 judges, those essays that receive an average of 80% or better should pass on to the second reading. (Those that do not will simply receive certificates of participation.) In the second reading, the judges should read all top 20% essays aloud, and engage in a measured discussion of their content and value before voting on the first, second, and third place essays for each grade level.

### Description of Criteria

#### 40% - Creativity

Although this is the most difficult thing to measure, it remains the focus of the competition and the most important aspect to take into account when grading essays. The goal is to reward students who display the ability to think “outside the box”—that is, those who provide something other than formulaic answers, and who can do so in a novel or unusual way. Here are the checkpoints to use for a truly creative essay in this competition:

- (10%) Does this essay express ideas not commonly found in the other essays? Yes / No
- (10%) Does this essay answer the question in an unexpected way? Yes / No
- (10%) Does this essay display a lot of thought on behalf of the student writing it? Yes / No
- (10%) Does this essay address the topic in a way that makes the reader think? Yes / No

#### 20% - Structure

The way in which an essay is organized helps make it more easily understood and appreciated. High school essays that are, for example, just one long paragraph with no visual breaks are both hard on the eyes and display a lack of maturity in composition. (However, exceptions may be made for younger students, such as those in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade.)

- (10%) Is this essay organized in a comprehensible way? Yes / No

- (10%) If the essay adheres to a traditional format, is there a clear beginning, middle, and end or introduction, body, and conclusion? Yes / No

#### **10% - Adherence to Topic**

Sometimes essays are cleverly written, but they actually have little to do with the given topic. While creative essays should be able to find many unusual ways to answer a question (questions can be answered as essays, stories, dialog, and so on), they should still, in some way, obviously respond to the chosen topic.

- (10%) Does this essay, in one way or another, address the topic at hand? Yes / No

#### **10% - Grammar**

Although good grammar is important and should not go unrewarded, the goal of this competition is to encourage creative thinking, not drive students to worry about their verb conjugation or spelling. That said, as long as the grammar is understandable and does not hinder a reader's ability to comprehend the essay, this 10% should be awarded.

- (10%) Is the grammar of this essay correct enough that the essay is easy to understand?  
Yes / No

#### **10% - Length**

There is no word maximum or minimum in the competition; however, most essays that are deemed worthy of a second reading should not be too short (i.e., only a few sentences). This will depend mostly on the student's age and grade; for example, a 12<sup>th</sup> grader's essay should ideally be *at least* 2 times as long as those written by most 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

- (10%) Is the essay of an appropriate length for the grade level of the student writing it?  
Yes / No

#### **10% - "Wow!" factor**

This portion is where points are awarded for exceptional essays—those that display an incredible use of vocabulary, clever ideas, mature style, advanced English for the writer's grade level, and so on. This 10% is to be awarded only to essays that truly impress the readers, and these essays should likely make it to the second reading session.

- (10%) Does this essay "wow" the reader for one reason or another? Yes / No

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